

SOCIAL INTEGRATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN THROUGH DRAMA

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to prove the fact that gifted children can improve their communication skills and their abilities to interact with the others through drama classes. Taking into consideration the certainty that this category of children deserve a special education, drama activities could be the solution and might also contribute to a better social integration. The lack of their speaking potential is one of the characteristics of gifted children. Unfortunately, they deal with real difficulties when it comes to communication, according to the latest as well as older studies and it has been observed that establishing connections with other children is a huge challenge for them. “However, there are aspects of giftedness such as hypersensitivity, perfectionism and inflexible schooling which can cause problems for a minority of gifted children and bring about conflict, anxiety and unwelcome behavior.”³⁶ This is one of the main reasons for which gifted children have to acquire social skills. They need to be taught how to behave, when and how to act and how to react in different situations. Theatre could be the means of developing the necessary competences for acting properly in society. In the following lines, we are going to prove that one of the purposes of drama classes is to support the evolution of gifted children in the community.*

Keywords: *gifted, social skills, integration, lack of communication, drama*

³⁶Joan Freeman, “Emotional problems of the gifted children”, published on 07.12.2006, accessed on 26.08.2020

Introduction

Being a gifted child nowadays it is not an advantage like plenty of people might think. Unfortunately there is no special curriculum for such children and even though in 2020 you would expect a more evolved syllabus, it seems that reality does not meet our expectations. In fact, it is quite a difficult process to accept the idea that you are being labeled as a special child with special needs. The truth is, that by doing so, society acknowledges the fact that they are different and they should be treated accordingly. Consequently, children respond in a negative manner to this kind of approach they get from teachers, classmates and society, in general.

The main concern is to avoid this kind of relation with gifted children and to try to treat them normally, like all the other the children. This could be one of the first steps in learning how to connect with a talented child. Of course they are not the same, which means they don't have the same abilities, but neither the same demands. Each case of a gifted child requires a different treatment when it comes to establishing healthy connections.

There is not a universal recipe that works with every special child. The huge challenge is that one must find the most appropriate way of connecting with each and every single gifted child. Once you find the best manner of communication, you will get the chance to help him/her improve their social skills in order to help them integrate properly in society. Drama classes offer them the opportunity of role play, a method/strategy which is well known for offering the chance to people to try different masks and impersonate characters that otherwise they wouldn't have even dreamed of. As a result, the tendency of the participants is to start showing empathy with people they wouldn't have thought of previously.

Gifted children

“In 1988 the US Congress defined gifted and talented as children and youth who give evidence of high performance

capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities.”³⁷ As a result, gifted children need to be treated as such. The usual schedule from an ordinary school will not be able to provide information in the manner these children expect or need. Drama classes could be the right solution in order to help them integrate properly into the community and get the chance to show their feelings to the others and to express themselves adequately.

Theatre can give them the opportunity to try and understand various states that they might have to cope with and don't know how to.

The main concern is first to help them identify correctly their emotions, their feelings, their moods and to find the right justification and the logic behind these sentiments. Gifted children need to be aware of their affection and to be capable of assuming it.

Lack of communication skills for gifted children

Generally speaking, gifted children encounter difficulties when it comes to verbal abilities. According to the studies, it is even more difficult for gifted boys to communicate than for gifted girls. There are also some other studies which have revealed that gifted children actually have real problems when it comes to communication skills. Their tendency is to isolate themselves from the others and to become even more introverted. Even in relation with their parents, these children, no matter the gender, show a closer attachment to their mothers than to their father. As a rule, children have proved a better connection with their mothers in comparison to

³⁷A report for the Council of Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment(CCEA), *Gifted and talented children in (and out) of the classroom*, published on 20.02.2006, http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/inclusion_and_sen/gifted/gifted_children_060306.pdf, accessed la 26.09.2020

their fathers and in the case of gifted ones such inclinations are even more amplified.

The purpose of people surrounding gifted children is to try to make their integration process easier. The operation accomplishing this social integration of talented children is an extremely difficult one, no matter if you are the teacher, one of her/his relatives or just friends. The main concern is the endeavor to help them bridge all the gaps properly.

Drama classes could be one of the best solutions for initiating the process of adjustment to social life. Theatre can make them ready for joining the community in a smooth and natural way. A theatre instructor could help gifted children to gain a better understanding of their emotions and feelings as well as express them in the right manner.

Gifted children and the search for identity

“The process of identity development in intellectually gifted children and adolescents is complicated by their innate and acquired differences from age-peers. To be valued within a peer culture which values conformity, gifted young people may mask their giftedness and develop alternative identities which are perceived as more socially acceptable. The weaving of this protective mask requires the gifted child to conceal his/her love of learning, interests which differ from those of peers, or their advanced moral development. If this assumed identity does indeed bring about the social acceptance she/he seeks for, the gifted child may become afraid to take off the mask. Gifted children and adolescents need the opportunity to work and socialize with others of similar abilities and interests if they are to grow towards self-acceptance.”³⁸

³⁸ Miraca U.M. Gross, “*The me behind the mask: Intellectually gifted students and the search for identity*” published on 20.01.2010, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02783199809553885>, accessed on 29.09.2020

This is one of the main reasons for which we strongly believe that teachers, at least, must have the ability to find and identify correctly the gifted students. As we have stated earlier, if they hide their abilities and try to mix with the rest of the children, most of the times they will be labeled as such. It is highly important to recognize the gifted children that act unseen, in different groups, in order to help them acquire the very social skills which might make their interaction easier and smooth. They want to be invisible and some of them choose so, exactly because of the difficult process of connecting in the community. They become frustrated when they are treated as different and that might trigger negative attitudes or behavior.

Appearances are deceptive, which means that even if they are children with special needs, they may not be so. The only motive for which a gifted child is not identified in an educational institution is because they managed to trick the system and the teachers, too. In search for their identity, they wear different masks, trying to find the most suitable one. Sometimes, they are inclined to choose a mask rather than their own true self. That's what teachers should try to avoid and stop by fighting against fraud. They need to accept themselves for who they are. Only after accepting themselves with the gifts they have, will they be emotionally ready for a genuine integration in the social life and the educational institution they attend.

Talent or giftedness?

Most of the times people, teachers included, make a confusion between talented and gifted children. Some of them believe that these two words are synonyms, which is a huge mistake. "There are a lot of people that use the word gifted when they speak about people that have extraordinary intellectual capabilities and use the word talented only when they speak about persons that own

extraordinary abilities in music or plastic arts.”³⁹ In some people’s vision, including the ones that activate in the educational system, talent is something that you definitely need to associate with arts, while giftedness is something related to more serious things, such as technical aptitudes, anyway pragmatic rigid skills.

“Giftedness may be defined as the total of personal (cognitive, motivational) and socio-cultural requirements for learning and performance... whereas the development of giftedness may be understood as the interaction of internal factors of aptitude and the external factors of socialization.”⁴⁰ As it was explained earlier, the social life of the gifted child is highly important and through drama classes they can improve their social skills that will help them develop their amazing abilities they are otherwise incapable of handling. The aim is to transform talent potential into talent performance. Some of the studies have shown that a part of the gifted children chose to be gifted, so they did their best to improve their skills in a certain direction. This statement is contradictory and controversial because some other studies show the fact that Olympic students are not necessarily gifted. They could be children that worked a lot and practiced constantly in order to accomplish such an achievement.

Actually, the IQ is the one that makes the difference between talented and gifted children. Under 100 at the IQ test qualifies you as a talented child, over it, it qualifies you as a gifted child.

Gifted education or special curricula through drama for social integration

“Every area of specialized talent has contents and a substance, its very special methodologies and processes, its modes of

³⁹ Franz J. Mönks, Irene H. Ypenburg, *Copilul nostru este supradotat*, Polirom, Iași, 2017, p. 67

⁴⁰ Franz J. Mönks, A. Harry Passow, *International Handbook of Research and Development of Giftedness and Talent*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 887

problem definition and problem solving, its ways of exercising creativity, innovation and originality. A specialized curriculum for the gifted should activate and motivate the commitment and the development of the competences and affective behaviors needed for nurturing one's special talent potential. For realizing these purposes advocacy groups play an important role.”⁴¹

It seems that a special curriculum helps gifted children to develop the abilities they already have and to expand their skills in character to the society's expectations in order to integrate adequately.

Sometimes teachers are trying to ask the gifted children to teach the other students the notions they have already learned. The thing is that in this manner they don't get bored and they are not obliged to listen all over again to the same explanations of a lesson they have already understood. This way they become the teacher for their classmates and accomplish both goals: they avoid getting bored of a curriculum they have already assimilated and they establish a healthy relationship with the other students.

Some studies reveal that this could be one of the solutions when you don't have the possibility of offering the gifted child a special program .In order to offer them one, you should have a specialized staff. Only functional teachers can handle the development of such a curriculum. Even so, their integration in the society could become a bit problematic and difficult, as long as they are kept isolated from the regular students. Such an action could develop frustration, inferiority complexes and a feeling of misunderstanding.

“Exceptionally able learners have problems like any other learner. They may have learning disabilities which they can hide while the work is easier. It becomes harder and harder for them to

⁴¹ Franz J. Mönks, A. Harry Passow, *International Handbook of Research and Development of Giftedness and Talent*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 889

excel, which can lead to behavioral problems and depression”⁴². As stated before it is not a must to consider all gifted children as performing children in every field. They can encounter many difficulties and they need the support of the people around them even though they are bright in other areas. At the end of the day they are still children in need of attention, love, dedication and support. Otherwise, like any other regular child they can present depression issues, sadness, misunderstanding and incapability of integrating in the social life and specific groups.

Conclusions

„While it’s true that children need to play and interact socially with other children their age, they do not always need to learn with them, for example the case of an exceptionally able child who has a chronological age of six and a mental age of 11 and has been reading since two. To put that child in a reading class with other six year olds who are just learning to read can be de-motivating for that child.”⁴³ As a result, the process of social integration of a gifted child is a ticklish one, but also a challenging one. Drama comes as a blessing for their absorption/integration in the community. Through these classes gifted children can learn how to accept themselves with their qualities, but with their flaws too.

⁴² National Council for Curriculum and Assessment(NCCA), Examination and Assessment (CCEA), Northern Ireland, “*Exceptionally Able Students, Drafts Guideline for Teachers*” published on 2006, https://ncca.ie/media/1974/exceptionally_able_students_draft_guidelines_for_teachers.pdf, p. 4, accessed on 20.10.2020

⁴³ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment(NCCA), Examination and Assessment(CCEA), Northern Ireland, “*Exceptionally Able Students, Drafts Guideline for Teachers*” published on 2006, https://ncca.ie/media/1974/exceptionally_able_students_draft_guidelines_for_teachers.pdf, p. 5, accessed on 20.10.2020

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reach the highest peak in the moment when she had the performance of teaching almost 350 students per week. Of course now, because of the context of COVID-19 pandemic which caused the ban of the extracurricular activities such as drama classes, she still reached a performance but in a different manner. Due to the restrictions pointed out earlier, she continued to hold the performance but this time it meant the loss of all the contracts and the students by default, reaching the exact number of zero children attending drama classes at the beginning of 2020 new school year. Contact: bianca.hedes@yahoo.com.